hyperion

CHORAL MUSIC BY GEORGE DYSON

Hierusalem

ST MICHAEL'S SINGERS

THOMAS TROTTER organ

ROYAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

JONATHAN RENNERT

SIR GEORGE DYSON
1883-1964

THREE SONGS OF PRAISE
for chorus and organ

1 Praise (George Herbert) [2'03]
2 Lauds (George Gascoigne) [4'41]
3 A Poet's Hymn (Robert Herrick) [4'26]

ST MICHAEL'S SINGERS THOMAS TROTTER organ

THREE CHORAL HYMNS
for chorus and organ

4 Morning and Evening (Isaac Watts) [4'20]
5 Hymn for a musician (William Austin) [2'52]
6 Hymn to the stars (William Habington) [4'45]

ST MICHAEL'S SINGERS THOMAS TROTTER organ

7 O PRAISE GOD IN HIS HOLINESS (PSALM 150)
for chorus and organ [1'59]

ST MICHAEL'S SINGERS THOMAS TROTTER organ

8 FANTASIA AND GROUND BASS
for organ [16'03]

JONATHAN RENNERT organ

9 HIERUSALEM
Hymn for soprano solo, chorus, solo string quartet and string orchestra,
with harp and organ [19'01]

VALERY HILL soprano ST MICHAEL'S SINGERS THOMAS TROTTER organ
ROYAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA
JONATHAN RENNERT conductor

SIR GEORGE DYSON

As teacher, broadcaster, author *(The New Music,* published in 1924, was a landmark in twentieth-century English criticism), administrator and public figure, Sir George Dyson played an influential role in British musical life for nearly fifty years. He was a Yorkshireman of working-class origin who owed none of his success to birth or influence. He won a scholarship to the Royal College of Music in London where he studied with Stanford and responded wholeheartedly to Parry. During the Great War his *Manual of Grenade-Fighting* was officially adopted by the War Office. (It was typical of his exceptionally keen and resilient mind that whatever circumstances forced him into doing he did well, even if it was killing Germans.) After the war he resumed his career of public-schoolmaster; his last and happiest appointment was at Winchester (1924-1937), the city which he came to regard as his spiritual home and whither he retired after completing fourteen years as the Director of the Royal College of Music. It was at Winchester that most of his best music was written, including the works on this compact disc.

If told that a man who led such a life also composed in his spare time, we would probably, one suspects, be only too ready to decry his music as 'academic'. In Dyson's case we would only have to listen to a few bars of *Hierusalem* to find our expectations confounded. There is little 'academic' (in the usual, pejorative sense) here. The prevailing temper is lyrical, even romantic; the scoring (for both voices and instruments) not merely competent but masterly; there is a dramatic streak; a sense of colour, of fitness of sound, of *beauty* of sound: Dyson is a poet, not a pedant (he disliked pretentious solemnities of all kinds, within music and without) and clearly a lover of the good things in life. He is also a professional. What language does he speak? English, no mistake. Imagine an idiom founded on Parry and Stanford which bypasses Elgar, lends a more willing ear to Vaughan Williams's modality and finds even more of interest in Delius's harmonic colours, his orchestral poetry-in-sound, and in Strauss's richness of texture; mix all these ingredients – and they blend well – and the result is more-or-less Dyson. It may be traditional fare, but the taste is good and it digests well. Dyson was a composer of a wider range than that embraced by his musical portrait-gallery after Chaucer, *The Canterbury Pilgrims*, the work by which he's chiefly remembered. As long as we are unfamiliar with such major scores as *The Blacksmiths, St Paul's Voyage to Melita, Nebuchadnezzar* and the gigantic

two-part oratorio *Quo Vadis* – which contains some glorious music – much of the most interesting part of the picture is missing. The Symphony and Violin Concerto, the *Concerto da Chiesa* and *Concerto da Camera* (both for strings) are also fine works and as unaccountably neglected as much else of that English vintage.

The **Three Choral Hymns** and **Three Songs of Praise** both date from the 1930s and Dyson's first Winchester period. Here the idiom might loosely be defined as 'festival English', since the composer is clearly intent on meeting the need of the school- and amateur choirs with which he was much involved at the time. But even when working within the bounds of a fairly narrow diatonic convention Dyson contrives many an imaginative touch: for instance, the modulation from stanza 1 to 2 of George Herbert's 'Praise' (is it exhilarating or just plain vulgar?) and the way in which the even-motioned crotchet tread, with its lack of rhythmic variety, is perfectly adjusted to the text of Dr Watts's 'Morning and Evening', concerned as it is with the inevitable unfolding of the daily routine. (The same applies to the simplicity and matter-of-factness of Herrick's 'A Poet's Hymn': and note the unbombastic grandeur of the peroration. Dyson learnt much from Parry about constructing broad and sonorous choral climaxes.) The setting of George Gascoigne's 'Lauds' is one of Dyson's loveliest, masterly in its encompassing, within a sustained mood of calm, of the progress from night-in-sleep to the encroaching brightness of sunrise. And where, one wonders, did Dyson find William Habington's gem-like 'Hymn to the Stars'?

> When I survey the bright celestial sphere
> So rich with jewels hung
> That Night doth like an Ethiope bride appear ...

The music of 'For the bright firmament ...' sounds a note of exalted but unaffected mysticism which links it not only with *Hierusalem* but also with his basically simple, unpretentious and eminently listenable-to composer's spiritual will-and-testament, *Quo Vadis*.

Written in 1960, the **Fantasia and Ground Bass** for organ is a product of Dyson's Indian Summer – a beautifully-made piece of happy invention, melodious and

unportentous in character. Although Dyson's career started in the organ-loft when he was a boy, only in the last decade of his life did he start to compose for the organ; in this he curiously resembles Parry.

Hierusalem was written in the composer's old age but isn't an old man's music. Remarkably, Dyson's music grew younger as the years advanced. The cantata *Sweet Thames, run softly* (after Spenser) has a distinctly youthful sensuousness, and *Hierusalem* a childlike aura of unsophisticated mysticism. *The Heavenly Jerusalem* was originally a poem of sixteenth-century origin derived both from the *Meditations* of St Augustine and St Peter Damian's *De Gloria Paradisi.* It perceives the Heavenly City much as would a child in the Wordsworthian sense – that is, with eyes unclouded and uncorroded by consciousness, by the curses of civilisation. The Celestial City first appears as a mirage (string quartet and *tutti* strings). The mists disperse: the soprano solo, pentatonically inclined (the pentatonic or five-note scale has ageless connotations of innocence) contrasts the beatific vision (pre-consciousness) with the yearning ache of the here-and-now. In a later passage the dream-ecstasy is shattered only in a last-line-of-stanza:

> Thy tiles are made of beaten gold –
> O God that I were there!

The solo soprano, in fact, is symbolic of the human longing (one solo voice) for release into the transcendent (choir), of the individual's desire to be absorbed into the cosmos. Her burden is always the same ('Thy joys when shall I see?') though always differently expressed musically, and the incidence of these stanzas of yearning is a factor Dyson puts to skilful use in avoiding stanzaic uniformity in his setting. Another is realizing the dramatic implications of the text in a way that in no way damages or deadens its spiritual resonance. A procession of pilgrims approaches from afar to repeated sighing phrases in the string quartet; the precious stones glint and glitter (harp arpeggios and spiky string semiquavers). The flood of life flows through the streets in ever-increasing jubilation until finally the gates are flung wide in a sunburst of sound – harp glissandi and repeated ecstatic cries of 'Hierusalem!' Now the picture begins to glow in rainbow hues ('Thy saints are crowned with glory great') and as the company of heaven is numbered in terms of

child-like candour the music assumes as almost Pre-Raphaelite quality of chastely sensuous sweetness. It is a telling stroke (and typical of Dyson the dramatist) when the soprano's entreating cries of 'Hierusalem' are ringingly echoed through the streets by the heavenly hosts (with full organ, here heard as such for the first and only time). Gradually the mists of the opening close in again, and the soprano has a last word as she soars up to her top B, then down, to end on a note of quiet rapture.

Hierusalem was composed in 1956 for Harold Darke and the St Michael's Singers; the soprano at the first performance was Isobel Baillie. So it is appropriate that the performers on this recording should be the present-day St Michael's Singers under Dr Darke's latter-day successor, Jonathan Rennert. The somewhat distant choral perspective, rendered inevitable both in performance and recording by the acoustic disposition of the forces and by the density of the accompanimental texture, is clearly intentional on the part of the composer. He wants us to hear the chorus as literally *heavenly,* not of-the-earth.

CHRISTOPHER PALMER

Christopher Palmer's George Dyson - a Centenary Appreciation is published by Novello & Co

THREE SONGS OF PRAISE

for chorus and organ

1 Praise

Let all the world in ev'ry corner sing,
My God and King!
The heavens are not too high,
His praise may thither fly;
The earth is not too low,
His praises there may grow.
Let all the world in ev'ry corner sing,
My God and King!
The Church with psalms must shout,
No door can keep them out;
But above all, the heart
Must bear the longest part.
Let all the world in ev'ry corner sing,
My God and King!

George Herbert (1593-1633)

2 Lauds

Ye that have spent the silent night
In sleep and quiet rest,
And joy to see the (cheerful) light
That riseth in the east;
Now lift your hearts, your voices raise,
Your morning tribute bring,
And pay a grateful song of praise
To Heaven's Almighty King

For as this gloomy night did last
But for a little space;
As heavenly day, (now night is past),
Doth show his pleasant face;
So let us hope, when faith and love
Their work on earth have done,
God's blessed face to see above,
Heaven's better, brighter sun.

George Gascoigne (c1534-1617)

3 A Poet's Hymn

Lord, thou hast given me a cell,
Wherein to dwell;
A little house, whose humble roof
Is weather proof.
Under the spars of which I lie
Both soft and dry;
Where thou my chamber for to ward
Hast set a guard
Of harmless thoughts to keep
Me while I sleep.
Low is my porch, as is my fate,
Both void of state;
And yet the threshold of my door
Is worn by the poor
Who thither come and freely get
Good words or meat.
Like as my parlour, so my hall

And kitchen's small
little buttery, and therein
A little bin,
Which keeps my little loaf of bread
Unchipp'd, unsped.
Some brittle sticks of thorn or briar
Make me a fire,
Close by whose living coal I sit
And glow like it.
All these and better thou dost send
Me to this end,
That I should render for my part
A thankful heart;
Which, fired by incense, I resign,
Wholly Thine,
But the acceptance must be,
My Christ, by Thee.

Robert Herrick (1591-1674)

THREE CHORAL HYMNS

for chorus and organ

4 Morning and Evening

My God, who makes the sun to know
His proper hour to rise,
And to give light to all below
Doth send him round the skies.

When from the chamber of the east
His morning race begins,
He never tires, nor stops to rest,
But round the world he spins.

So, like the sun, would I fulfil
The business of the day;
Begin my work betimes, and still
March on my heavenly way.

And now another day is gone,
I'll sing my Maker's praise.
My comforts every hour make known
His providence and grace.

I lay my body down to sleep;
Let angels guard my head,
And through the hours of darkness keep
Their watch around my bed.

With cheerful heart I close my eyes,
Since thou wilt not remove;
And in the morning let me rise
Rejoicing in thy love.

Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

5 Hymn for a musician

Unto Thy word so tuned let me be,
That in each part I may thereto agree.
He sings and plays the songs which best Thou lovest,
Who does and says the things which Thou approvest.

Teach me the strain that calmeth minds enraged
And which from vain affections doth recall.
So to the choir where angels music make
I may aspire when I this life forsake.

William Austin

6 Hymn to the stars

When I survey the bright celestial sphere
So rich with jewels hung
That Night doth like an Ethiope bride appear,

My soul her wings doth spread and heavenward flies,
The Almighty's mysteries
To read in the large volumes of the skies.

No unregarded star contracts its light
Into so small a character
Removed far from our human sight.

But if we steadfast look, we shall discern
In it, as in some holy book,
How man may heavenly knowledge learn.

For the bright firmament shoots forth no flame
So silent, but is eloquent
In speaking the Creator's name.

WILLIAM HABINGTON (1605-1654)

7 O PRAISE GOD IN HIS HOLINESS (PSALM 150)

for chorus and organ

O praise God in his holiness,
Praise him in the firmament of his power.
Praise him in his noble acts.
Praise him in his excellent greatness.
Praise him in the sound of the trumpet.
Praise him upon the lute and harp.
Praise him in the cymbals and dances.
Praise him upon the strings and pipe.
Praise him on the well-tuned cymbals.
Praise him on the loud cymbals.
Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord.

8 FANTASIA AND GROUND BASS

for organ

9 HIERUSALEM

Hymn for soprano solo, chorus, solo string quartet and string orchestra, with harp and organ

Hierusalem, my happy home,
When shall I come to thee?
When shall my sorrows have an end?
Thy joys when shall I see?

O happy harbour of the saints,
O sweet and pleasant soil!
In thee no sorrow may be found,
No grief, no care, no toil.

Thy walls are made of precious stones,
Thy bulwarks diamonds square;
Thy gates are of right orient pearl,
Exceeding rich and rare.

Thy houses are of ivory,
Thy windows crystal clear;
Thy tiles are made of beaten gold –
O God that I were there!

Thy vineyards and thy orchards are
Most beautiful and fair,
Full furnished with trees and fruits
Most wonderful and rare;

Thy gardens and thy gallant walks
Continually are green;
There grow such sweet and pleasant flowers
As nowhere else are seen.

Quiet through the streets with silver sound
The flood of life doth flow,
Upon whose banks on every side
The wood of life doth grow.

There trees for evermore bear fruit
And evermore do spring;
There evermore the angels sit
And evermore do sing.

Hierusalem, my happy home,
When shall I come to thee?
When shall my sorrows have an end?
Thy joys when shall I see?

Thy saints are crowned with glory great;
They see God face to face;
They triumph still, they still rejoice:
Most happy is their case.

There David stands with harp in hand
As master of the choir;
Ten thousand times that man were blest
That might this music hear.

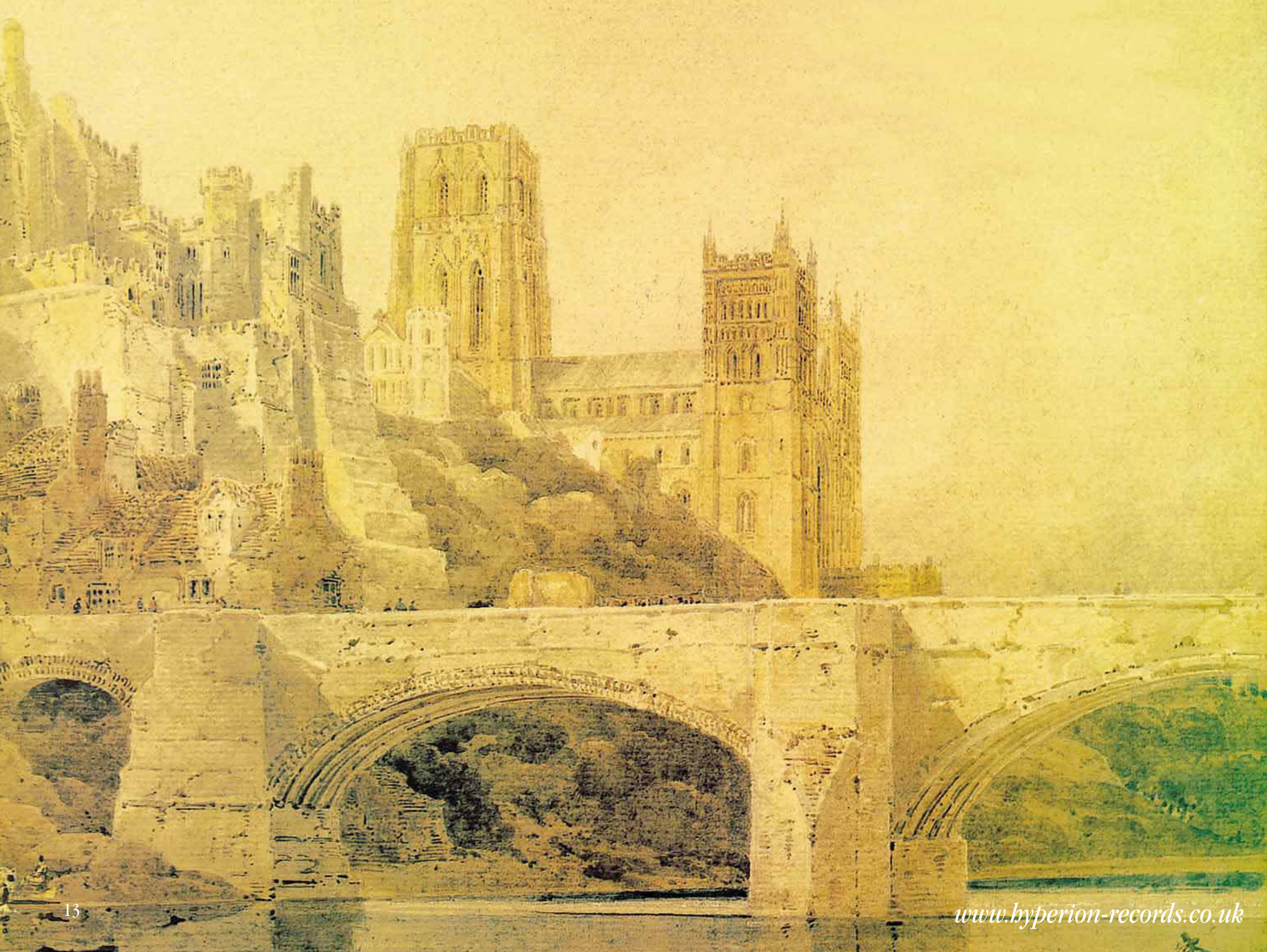
Our Lady sings Magnificat
With tune surpassing sweet;
And all the virgins bear their parts,
Sitting about her feet.

Te Deum doth Saint Ambrose sing,
Saint Austin doth the like;
Old Simeon and Zachary
Have not their songs to seek.

There Magdalene hath left her moan,
And cheerfully doth sing
With blessed saints, whose harmony
In every street doth ring.

Hierusalem, Hierusalem,
God grant I yet may share
Thy holy light, thy tuneful song,
Thy bliss beyond compare

Recorded in the Church of St Mary Magdalene, Paddington, London
on 12 13 November 1983 and 1 2 March 1984
Recording Engineer TONY FAULKNER
Recording Producer CHRISTOPHER PALMER
Front Design TERRY SHANNON
℗ Hyperion Records Limited, London, 1990
© Hyperion Records Limited, London, 2001

Front illustration: *Durham Cathedral and Bridge from the River Wear* (detail)
by Thomas Girtin (1775-1802). Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester

Copyright subsists in all Hyperion recordings and it is illegal to copy them, in whole or in part, for any purpose whatsoever, without permission from the copyright holder, Hyperion Records Ltd, PO Box 25, London SE9 1AX, England. Any unauthorized copying or re-recording, broadcasting, or public performance of this or any other Hyperion recording will constitute an infringement of copyright. Applications for a public performance licence should be sent to Phonographic Performance Ltd, 1 Upper James Street, London W1F 9DE